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Stephen Rhodes: Out Racing for Equality

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MARCH 19-APRIL 1, 2015

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Online Magazine



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ON THE COVER

Our first Ride Review Issue features Stephen Rhodes, our next out and proud sports hero, who is out racing for equality. Photo by Olga Brycht

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Managing Editor Andy Lien 612-436-4671
Assistant Managing Editor Shane Lueck 612-436-4692
Editorial Assistant Linda Raines 612-436-4694
Editor Emeritus Ethan Boatner
Editorial Associate George Holdgrafer
Copy Editor Bridget Rocheford-Kearney
Contributors Kathleen Bradbury, Nell Gelhaus, Ed Huyck, Justin Jones, Ellen Krug, Steve Lenius, Shane Lueck, Brandon McCray, Jennifer Parello, Randy Stern, Joy Summers, John Townsend, Bradley Traynor, Carla Waldemar

Advertising

Sales & Advertising Director Barry Leavitt 612-436-4690
Senior Account Executive Suzanne Farrell 612-436-4699
Account Executives Robert Felton 612-436-4697, Richard Kranz 612-436-4675
Advertising Associate George Holdgrafer
Sales & Advertising Traffic Coordinator Linda Raines 612-436-4694
Sales Lead Specialist Michelle Ulmer 612-436-4693
Classifieds Suzanne Farrell 612-436-4699
National Sales Representative Rivendell Media 212-242-6863

Creative

Creative Director Hubert Bonnet 612-436-4678
Graphic Designer Mike Hnida 612-436-4679
Photographer Sophia Hantzes
Lavender Studios Hubert Bonnet, Mike Hnida

Administration

Publisher Lavender Media, Inc.
President & CEO Stephen Rocheford 612-436-4665
Vice President & CC Pierre Tardif 612-436-4666
Chief Financial Officer Monika Deinard 612-436-4664
Administrative Assistant Austin Lindstrom 612-436-4660
Founders George Holdgrafer, Stephen Rocheford
Inspiration Steven W. Anderson (1954-1994), Timothy J. Lee (1968-2002), Russell Berg (1957-2005), Kathryn Rocheford (1914-2006), Jonathan Halverson (1974-2010), Adam Houghtaling (1984-2012), Walker Pearce (1946-2013)

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Lavender Media, Inc.

7701 York Ave S, Suite 225, Edina, MN 55435
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612-436-4685 **Fax**
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Denise Nix

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Interesting Fact: I always wanted to be a gay man because I should've been born a queen.

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FROM THE EDITOR | BY ANDY LIEN

My Chariot Awaits

I've been driving for 21 years. I felt another grey hair sprout as I typed that. In my advanced years, I've figured out what I like and need in the vehicle I drive. What I drive is something that is more important to me than I ever would have imagined. I'm guessing it's because I know very little about automobiles. When I don't know much (and really don't intend to learn about them), I need to feel safe and comfortable in my choice. A vehicle is what we trust ourselves and our people in, as well as our pets and our possessions. In Minnesota, we go from humid and hot to foggy and damp to snowy and slick within months or days. That leaves me feeling a bit more vulnerable than I like to be, I won't lie. So, I've figured out what is on my list of "must haves" in a ride.

Height. As a definite indicator of my personality, I like to see what's coming. If I'm the short vehicle behind a taller one, I get antsy and either back off quite a bit or switch lanes to get ahead; not because I need to get somewhere faster, but because I want to have the longview (cue Green Day). So, climbing up into a vehicle is more likely to suit my interests than slinking down into a low-rider. Big tires are a bonus.

4WD. I'm a single person who lives alone in Minnesota, who doesn't plan on curbing my schedule or wanderlust just because we get a couple inches or feet of the white stuff. I need to know that I can drive out of anything, should the need arise. I know, people can tell me that front-wheel drive is reliable, but my history has gone Buick Regal, Oldsmobile Alero, Subaru Legacy (AWD), Toyota Camry, and Jeep Liberty (4WD). Nothing compares to the feeling of traction when I flip the switch from regular to 4WD. It is confidence. It is knowing that my fortress is my vehicle and it goes where I go.

Clean, classic lines. Speaking of fortresses, I love a strong, square

appearance over a curvy and sleek one. The wind resistance (and fuel economy) is like driving a shoebox, but with more sport to it. I don't want trend, I want staid. My boxy ride reminds me of the rectangular Volvo of yore as well as the Land Rovers and Cruisers that are seen out on safari. It makes me feel a bit more regimented with its square hospital corners. It might be playful, but it's serious about it. Just like me.

Neutral exterior. While I'm out playing in the mud, I do appreciate the fact that my Jeep is the color of dust. I've had white, silver, blue, and black vehicles. This "stone" color is the one that is most forgiving. I ain't got time to bleed! I certainly don't have time to get it washed very often, especially since I don't have covered parking and might find a sheen of mystery dust on it any given morning. Really, in the warmer months, a nice coating of dirt lends to its character (and covers some of the scratches I've earned while off-roading).

Access to outdoors. My ride has to be able to be outdoors and get me out there, too. It's trail-rated, but that's not even as important as just having the clearance to make it up the winding sandy driveway from the road to my cabin without scraping the whole way. It's got a 3' x 5' ragtop roof that opens to the sky like a convertible, but with less exposure, which is perfect for my style of conservative recreation and sunburn-prone skin. I've gone driving on the sandy beaches of the Outer Banks in North Carolina with wild mustangs to my left and jellyfish in the ocean to my right. While I might not do that on my commute between St. Paul and Edina, I like that I would be able to, if the opportunity presents itself.

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With thanks,

Andy ■



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(CHET, MARY TYLER MOORE, & BENJAMIN)

Pure-D Meanness: The Eighth Deadly Sin?

I can understand anger, jealousy, and some other unsavory emotions, but I have never been able to comprehend what my southern relatives called, “Pure-D Meanness.” It seems to be everywhere today, perhaps because we live in a tell-all internet world. It ranges from the lowest to the highest levels, and it seems not to matter how petty the issue, how deserved another’s good fortune, how plain human compassion would dictate acting otherwise, the Pure-D Mean rush to thrust a stick in the spokes of another’s wheel.

Those little libraries. Orange-crate-sized structures, plain or decorated, a homeowner has placed outside his door, accessible for passers-by to take a free book and leave one for another reader. Sharing is their purpose; neighborliness, friendship, good will. What’s not to like?

Well, plenty, it seems. Some have objected to “free-standing structures” on one’s own property. Like that of the nine-year-old Kansas boy who built one for a Mother’s Day gift. Local officials soon notified him it was in violation of ordinances. Someone was getting and giving pleasure that they shouldn’t be.

Who wants to deny food to the homeless? Enough so that giving

free food outside is illegal in some thirty cities. Laughable — if it weren’t despicable — in light of the fact that these very deniers insist we all take literally a book in which a man feeds free loaves and fishes to the multitudes.

There’s currently only one same-sex couple legally married in Texas, given that dispensation only because one is dying of cancer. Now there’s move to un-marry these women that have been together thirty-one years with two children. And how about Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker who, a while back, wanted a new law to keep same-sex partners from visiting loved ones in the hospital? Pure-D Meanness, in my opinion.

For a nation slouching its way toward a Christian fundamentalist theocracy, it seems hypocritical even to the non-religious that what the Pure-D Mean are jettisoning are the very actions Jesus himself preached and performed; love, mercy, and compassion for others. There is no reason or excuse to deny others these small (or the great) kindnesses; no dangers incurred, deniers are themselves denied nothing.

Mean has the connotations of “cruelty” and “smallness.” The Pure-D Mean are riddled through with both. ■



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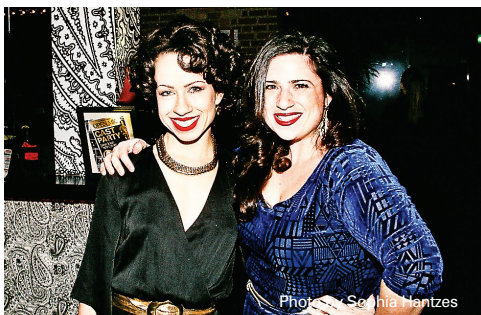
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150 years ago, this year, the Civil War was winding down. Emancipation and abolition had been realized and Lincoln's assassination would happen in April. To mark the closing year of the Sesquicentennial, Minnesota Public Radio, Minnesota Historical Society, and the Minnesota Civil War Commemoration Task Force are co-producing a performance event directed by Craig Johnson with the talents of Dan Chouinard, Kevin Kling, Maria Jette, T. Mychael Rambo, Prudence Johnson, Roe Family Singer members, the Brass Messengers, and more.

Dan Chouinard on the music: "My aim is to see that text and



Civil War Homecoming. Image courtesy of Minnesota Public Radio

melody and song all work toward the same storytelling goal, which is, in this case, to travel humanely the emotional highs and lows of the end of the Civil War. Some of the tunes are really familiar, like 'The Vacant Chair' and 'Home Sweet Home.' And a few are

new to me and won't leave my head, 'Maiden in the Garden' is playing in my head right now. And one is from a Minnesota soldier, Captain William LeDuc from Hastings, a tune written while he was stationed at Lookout Mountain in Tennessee in 1864."



Culture Wars: Then And Now. Photo by Kurt Ehrmann

CULTURE WARS: THEN AND NOW

Mar. 26 - 28

Walker Art Center
 1750 Hennepin Ave, Mpls.
www.walkerartcenter.org

21 years ago gay performer Ron Athey's incision blood ritual performance stunned the nation as a Walker Art Center presentation at Patrick's Cabaret. An alarmist *Star Tribune* review with serious misinformation turned it into an intense national issue. Radio shock jock Rush Limbaugh, conservative Judeo-Christians, and GOP Senator Jesse Helms piled on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Walker. NEA funding was threatened and resulted in specified cuts and stigma. It triggered an angry national debate and government action about what should be publicly funded and what shouldn't. In the early days of *Lavender*, this writer wrote a series regarding the crisis titled "Hunting Down the Homos."

The Walker now reflects on that time with a conversation between Athey and UC Riverside English Professor Jennifer Doyle, a U of M symposium, and performances at Patrick's Cabaret. Patrick Scully, Cabaret founder and



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director at the time says of the performance, “The culture wars that followed were immediate, intimidating, and concrete. The wounds were real, not an abstract philosophical debate. Queer-hating conservatives succeeded in further restricting access to who got to create artwork. The results reverberate today.”

LEAH'S TRAIN

Through Mar. 22

Sabes JCC Theatre, 4330 Cedar Lake Rd., Mpls.
www.sabesjcc.org

We hear a lot nowadays about Americans, individually, and the US government not really understanding other cultures, yet making dire ahistorical judgments against them. Indeed, any number of countries have ugly histories of war, torture, gender and sexuality shaming, etc. But learning about those cultures can chip away at our ignorance of why they become how they are.

20% Theatre Company Twin Cities and the Sabes Jewish Community Center reflect on three generations of Jewish women with considerable emphasis on their Russian roots. Karen Hartman's *Leah's Train* looks at how we idealize elders, how we are affected by abandonment, and family relationships.

Director Chava Curland describes Hartman's as a “world of confinement and motion.” She says, “At first glance the action on the stage seems simple and straightforward, like a train. But under the surface of the dialogue are deep, complex, and often paradoxical emotions that drive each of our heroes on a twisted path through past and present.”

VILE AFFECTIONS

Mar. 21 – 29

People's Center Theater
425 So. 20th Ave., Mpls.
www.gadflytheatre.org

Records of lesbian relationships of the distant past are few and far between. However, playwright Vanda has looked into the story around Mother Benedetta Carlini in post-Renaissance Italy. Amanda Kay Thomm, Emily Weiss, and Robb Krueger play major roles in this Gadfly production.

Director Cassandra Snow shares, “In the world of *Vile Affections*, which is a dramatization of a true story, the reason the affair between two women is such a huge deal is because no one had ever actually been confronted with sexual acts between two women at this time. Rumors, poetry, and art depicting such were laughed off or suppressed. The certainty men felt at sexuality being phallocentric and women needing them is ripped away. They are forced to not only confront homosexuality, but women's sexuality. This does more than shock them or make them angry; as presented in the play, it rips away the cord on facts they thought were certain.”

Snow points out, “There's a metaphor used throughout the play about Galileo's hypothesis that posited the sun as the center of the Earth. This hypothesis inspired more fear throughout the Catholic Church at this time than the neighboring plague that's also mentioned throughout because of how much doctrine and fact this would call into question. Much as Galileo was punished for pushing forward new scientific ideas, religious bigotry also punishes our protagonist for throwing new ideas in their faces, however accidentally. It's not specifically fear of the unknown that invokes religious bigotry — it's fear that things you accepted as true may not be.”



The Woodsman. Photo by Charles Gorrell

THE WOODSMAN

Through Mar. 23

Nimbus Theatre
1517 Central Ave. NE, Mpls.
www.theatreprorata.org

The crime that holds the darkest social stigma is surely child molestation. It's the one sin that most people agree should be unforgivable. There are rote and legitimate explanations that arise about the molester having been molested him or herself. But these generalizations seldom hold sway in the face of the social shaming spree that always kicks in. Sex offenders are routinely driven away from housing and employment and are often threatened in other ways and brutalized, even by those who see themselves as nonviolent.

Theatre Pro Rata has taken on controversial material in the past but *The Woodsman* by Steven Fechter is their gutsiest choice yet. Director

Erik Hoover has talked with law enforcement, child protection, and psychologists and says it has been an emotionally challenging experience for the cast. He observes that “ignorance and silence only make it tougher to protect children.”

Adam Whisner, who plays protagonist Walter, has learned that “shame about sexuality at an early age seems to be a huge factor. I believe strongly that some parents' lack of openness and willingness to discuss sexuality with their children can play a big role in this. Shame doesn't explain what specifically compels a person to sexually abuse someone, though.” Whisner recently gave a brilliant leading performance as a delusional and tyrannical Christian cult leader in Loudmouth Collective's staging of Samuel Hunter's *A Bright New Boise*. He is known for his emotionally courageous approach to acting. ■

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Tamara Brown parked the food truck and opened a bright Nokomis location in Minneapolis. Look for the sassy spoons...and park yourself!

Sassy Spoon

If I told you we were going to a gluten-free restaurant for dinner tonight, you'd probably panic. Or roll your eyes. Those two little words easily incite visions of tasteless, unsatisfying cardboard-like foodstuffs. The first gluten-free cupcake I ever bit into, for example, tasted vaguely of doorknob.

No longer necessarily so in 2015. Gluten-free (albeit an important label for sufferers of Celiac disease, as well as followers of an ever-growing food trend) does not have to mean taste-free. I am happy to report I learned this lesson firsthand, the easy way, a couple weeks back during a visit to Sassy Spoon with friends.

That delightful pink food truck with the yummy braised pork, you ask?

No, actually. Rather, that delightful pink brick-and-mortar restaurant with the yummy braised pork. In fact, owner Tamara Brown has permanently parked her mobile food fiesta in favor of a roof and four walls in south Minneapolis where she can now serve more of her food to more of her customers.

Trust me, that's a good thing.

Nestled in the Nokomis neighborhood, Sassy Spoon is single-hand-

edly shifting the gluten-free paradigm by offering honest to goodness, delicious food that, oh by the way, also happens to be gluten-free.

A lesson I learned from my very first bite.

Remember that yummy braised pork? The signature Sassy Spoon dish is unreal in its umami-laden unctuousness. And its sister on the plate, a fresh ginger garlic coleslaw, crisply cuts the richness of the meat, while adding a zesty zing most slaws don't. Can't. This is an everyday dish. As in, I could eat this dish every day. And not get tired of it.

Now, you could have the yummy braised pork and slaw, leave Sassy Spoon, and be totally satisfied by your experience.

I said you could. But don't. There's much more I want you to try.

For starters, order the stuffed dates. Sure, everybody does stuffed dates. Sassy Spoon's stuffed dates, however, deserve special mention. Where lesser versions of this appetizer tend toward the date-heavy and bacon-bare, Sassy's serve up the perfect ratio of bacon to date to goat cheese. Don't deprive your mouth of this salty, sweet, smoky treat.

In addition to the afore-worshiped braised pork, whether you're brunching or having dinner (or, projected for later this spring, lunch)

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Clockwise: Pepperoni pizza with yucca crust, the best date-to-bacon-to-cheese-ratio apps out there, and curry with a kick.

you've got several other solid entree options at Sassy Spoon.

The chicken curry, for example was a big comfort food hit. The spicy red coconut sauce smothers tasty chicken thighs like a big velvety blanket atop a steaming mound of cauliflower "fried rice." You will covet this dish.

Quick show of hands: how many of you have forgotten everything we've eaten so far is gluten-free? All of you. Good.

Then your next order of business is to order the flatbread pizza. Gluten-free pizza, you sneer? Wipe those visions of cardboard from your mind right now. Order the pizza. And behold the power of the yucca crust. Yucca is a magical gluten-free starch that makes a most munchy crust. Pair that pizza with a glass of wine, mead, cider or gluten-free beer and you're golden.

Now that I think about it, it was with my first few bites of that pizza, actually, when I knew Sassy Spoon lived up to its reputation and the vision of its owner Tamara Brown to serve up "wholesome food with attitude." The



pizza, like all of the dishes, isn't some sad, hollow substitute for the real thing. It stands all on its own, confident in its ability to challenge and delight.

Before I forget, do not leave without letting the chocolate chip cookie dough challenge and delight you. Or any of the other scratch-made desserts on hand, for that matter.

Whether you have a gluten allergy, skew Paleo, avoid processed foods, or are just looking for healthier dining options, you'd do well to walk through the doors of Sassy Spoon sometime soon. If, on the other hand, you think gluten-free is a passing fad, roll your eyes at the mere mention of Paleo and revel in processed foods on a regular basis, your trip to Sassy Spoon would be no less enjoyable.

Because, at the end of the day, good food is good food. And good food is to be had at Sassy Spoon. ■

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Two Contests, Two Banquets



(Clockwise from left) Stephen Patton, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015. Photo by Steve Lenius. Knights of Leather banquet attendees raise their glasses in honor of the club's founding leatherwomen. Photo by Everett Allen Photography. Family portrait: Aton's full club members and pledges. Photo by Everett Allen Photography.

This issue's Leather Life column is bursting at the seams. And that's a good thing.

The handsome gentleman shown above is Steven Patton, who captured the Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015 title on Feb. 14.

But before I tell you about the Mr. Twin Cities Leather weekend, let me tell you about a few other recent community happenings. The local leather/BDSM/fetish community lately has

been so vibrant and active that I must squeeze coverage of four events into one column.

MR & MISS CATASTROPHE CONTEST

The Mr & Miss Catastrophe Contest, a mash-up (or perhaps a smash-up?) of leather and drag, took place Jan. 10 at The Saloon. To compete for Mr Catastrophe, two leatherwomen donned beards, boots, and lumberjack gear. Meanwhile, four leathermen competed for

Miss Catastrophe by donning dresses, wigs, and makeup — and, in one instance, some venetian blinds in a tribute to Carol Burnett's famous "Went With the Wind" skit.

The Catastrophe contest was a lighthearted fundraiser for the upcoming Minnesota Leather Pride Weekend, April 3–5, which will include three (genuine) contests: Minnesota Leather Sir, Minnesota Leatherboy, and Ms.

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Miss Catastrophe winner Michael Kramer and Mr Catastrophe winner Valkyrie; Photo by Everett Allen Photography. Mr & Miss Catastrophe contestants and judges; Photo by Everett Allen Photography.



Minnesota Leather Pride. Because these contests are sponsored by the community rather than a bar or business, the Minnesota Leather Pride Weekend producers were looking for an appropriate and fun concept for a community fundraiser. They found their concept when one of the producers remembered that his red-neck-Texas high school had presented a Miss Catastrophe contest in which the football players dressed up in drag.

KNIGHTS OF LEATHER 30TH-ANNIVERSARY BANQUET

The Knights of Leather recently celebrated two milestones: 30 years since the founding of the Knights as a women's leather club and 15 years since the Knights' restructuring as a pan-sexual leather club.

The Knights, and many friends of the club, celebrated these milestones at a 30th anniversary banquet January 24 at the Crowne Plaza Bloomington. Everyone showed up in their best leather or fetish formalwear, and the evening was devoted to reminiscing and sharing stories of the club's Tournament runs and other events that occurred over the past thirty years. A collection of scrapbooks containing

Knights history and artifacts was on display at the back of the room.

ATONS OFFICER INSTALLATION BANQUET

The Atons of Minneapolis kicked off their 43rd year as a club with their annual officer installation banquet Sunday afternoon, Feb. 8, at Elsie's in northeast Minneapolis.

In addition to the swearing-in of new officers, the club presented a Friend of the Atons award to Tim Balfanz, general manager of The Saloon; an Associate Excellence award to associate member Tim Hotchkin; and a new award, Puppy of the Year, to Pup Bruizer.

Also recognized at the banquet were Atons members Bobbie Smith, for whom a covering ceremony was held last June, and Sam Carlisle, who was presented with a leather cap by outgoing club president Andrew Bertke.

MR. TWIN CITIES LEATHER 2015

The Mr. Twin Cities Leather (TCL) 2015 contest weekend took place on Valentine's Day weekend, Feb. 13–15. On Friday night a meet-and-greet took place in the Saloon's fireplace lounge. Saturday was packed with several Kink

U classes and a well-attended community forum and panel discussion on the AIDS/HIV prevention strategy known as Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

During Saturday evening's contest, all five of the weekend's contestants got their chance to shine. Justin Anderson demonstrated his rope-bondage escape skills; Thomas Beranek taught an impressive, and foamy, chemistry lesson; Cory Koplin crafted a decorative Crisco lamp; Travis Lenander presented a touching story of a boy and his Ironpup; and Steven Patton, accompanied by a Julia Child "French Chef" voiceover, demonstrated how to tie up a pig (but he used a boy as a stand-in for the pig). The climax of the evening occurred when outgoing Mr. TCL Greg Menzel sashed Patton as his successor.

Sunday's victory brunch was followed by a new addition to the Twin Cities Leather weekend schedule: the inaugural presentation of the Community First! community service award, this year to Bobbie Smith. As Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015, Patton will compete in the International Mr. Leather contest in Chicago this coming Memorial Day weekend. ■

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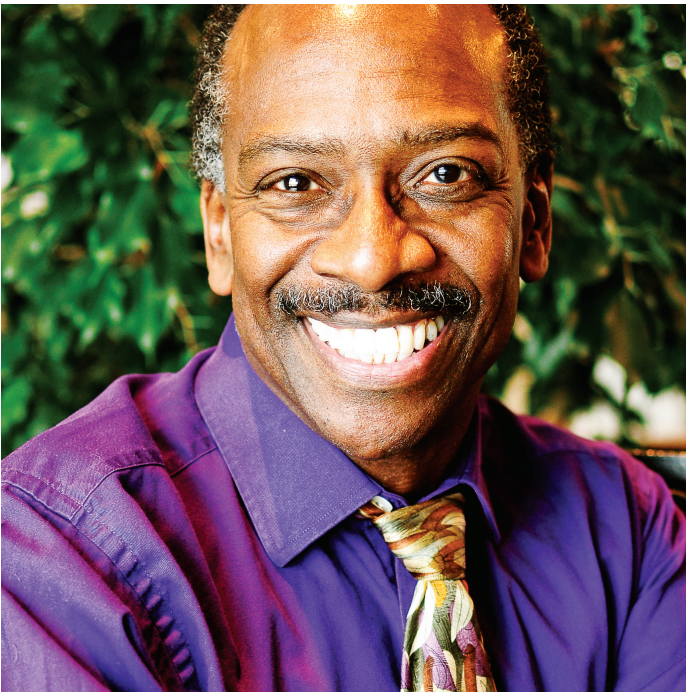
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Creating Space: Upper Midwest QIPOC Conference 2015



Harry Waters Jr.; Photo courtesy of Macalester College. Sasha Wijeyeratne; Photo by Chelsea O'Neil.

Marginalized identities lack the space to share their stories. Combine multiple marginalized identities and that space grows even smaller. Jason Jackson and Xay Yang, co-chairs of the Upper Midwest Queer Indigenous and People of Color (QIPOC) Conference, saw the need to create that space and set out to do just that.

"The vision for this conference was to create space — as simple as that," Jackson says. "We wanted an environment where queer indigenous and people of color can come together to connect and share their own stories. I really hope by people coming together that they can potentially create organizations that center around intersectional identities and issues."

Yang echoes that statement: "It was a mat-

ter of creating intentional and rare space for community building, knowledge sharing, and a space for healing and inspiring each other."

The conference will address race, gender, class, immigration, sexual justice, and more critical conversations that impact daily experiences. According to Jackson (who also serves as the GLBTA Programs Office Assistant Director at the University of Minnesota), the importance of community building is essential as well as how queer indigenous and people of color can work together in communities throughout the Midwest.

"The conference is going to address our need to access knowledge and power within our own communities that we have and can build on," Yang says. "Through many years of

oppression, sometimes we start to internalize that oppression and forget that we have knowledge, power, strength, and resilience within our own QIPOC communities."

The idea for the conference came about when the two of them went to a QIPOC conference on the West Coast and saw an opportunity to bring it back to the Midwest. Here in Minneapolis, we are very fortunate to be able to have access to resources that enable the creation of a space on this scale for specific communities (that notion of access is why there is even free HIV and Syphilis testing on-site during the conference).

"There is a fair amount of resources here for LGBT people and folks of color," Jackson says. "However, I do hope that after this conference,



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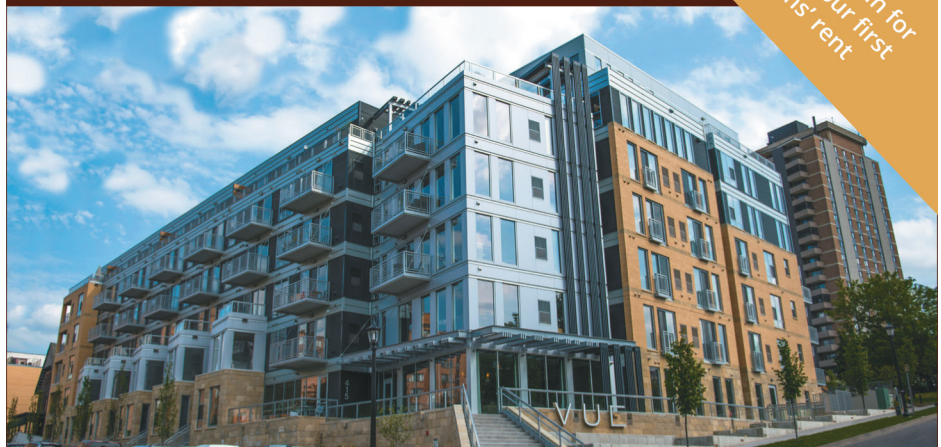


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there's potential for this initiative to happen in another area or city in the Upper Midwest."

Yang adds, "There are many fierce QIPOC leaders who are within the Midwest region and so we created this conference in the hope and trust that it'll travel across the midwest region and not just stay in Minneapolis."

But for this inaugural year, Minneapolis will play host to the conference April 10–12. With two committees (each with more than 30 members who are organizers, educators, students, artists, and activists), Jackson says people have come together in solidarity to work in alliance across multiple identities and learn skills that are transferable. Another drive making this conference happen is the support from organizations such as PFund Foundation, RARE Productions, The University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, and Soul Friday MPLS to name a few.

"[We've got] great resources and a powerhouse committee," Yang says. "There's a lot of love and community in all of this planning and that's our secret recipe."

That word comes up again and again: community. Community and connectedness are at the heart of this conference. "As QIPOC we don't always get the opportunity to see each other and work/live together," Jackson says. "We are often in spaces where we feel as if we need to hedge one or more of our identities or be 'on!' I truly believe that spaces like these have the potential for folks to come together to actually breathe for once and not have to put on a façade."

As Yang put it, the Upper Midwest is a very unique region (and not just a "flyover state"). The area has a lot going on, but unfortunately, the pockets of QIPOC folks are sometimes far and wide apart or, really, just lack the time and the space to be together with one another. "It's important to have a space where we can all be in community with people that look like us; it's very empowering," she says. "On top of that, it's bonus points if it's intergenerational because at the heart of our knowledge is storytelling from those who have been here before us."

With storytelling at the the base of the conference, Jackson and Yang have invited two keynote speakers to share their wisdom. Harry Waters Jr. is a stage and film actor and is currently a tenured professor in the Theatre and Dance Department at Macalester College. As someone who Jackson has looked up to ever since he moved to the Twin Cities, Jackson says he is a person who "speaks truth to power and is an extremely inspirational hu-

man." From his work in academics, theater arts, and the community, his life lessons and perspectives will inspire.

The second keynote address will be given by Sasha Wijeyeratne, Social Justice Education Specialist at University of Wisconsin–Madison, who inspired Yang with a sense of leadership and down-to-earth charisma. "When I first met Sasha, we were both professionals in higher education," Yang says. "It was later that I found out about Sasha's involvement in QPOC community organizing that really left me in admiration. Sasha is truly someone that works at the intersections of identities and understands the challenges that come with it, both as a professional but also personally. Sasha's commitment to social justice education complements the community organizing that Sasha's been a part of and I know that the stories that Sasha has to share will leave people feeling motivated, heard, and inspired."

Deciding on speakers is undoubtedly a difficult task, and one that Jackson and Yang struggled with initially. They admit to trying to please everyone until community organizer Roxanne Andersen asked them, as the conference organizers, who *they* want to bring to the conference.

"It never even occurred to me to even think about what we want, but when I did Harry was a natural choice," Jackson says. "I run a program at the University of Minnesota called Tongues Untied, which is a discussion group for Queer Folks of Color. He came in and spoke to the attendees and I was blown away."

Yang expressed similar sentiments. "Sasha came to mind very naturally," she says. "I really considered Minnesota to be home to one of the biggest populations of Hmong people and the place where the only Hmong LGBTQ organization lives but I knew deep down that there other voices that we weren't hearing from and that was the South Asian and Pacific Islander community whose voices weren't represented."

Despite the keynote addresses coming from people involved with academics, that is not who the conference is geared toward; the conference is aimed at and centered around the voices of Queer Indigenous and People of Color. Since this conference is one of the first of its kind in the Midwest, Jackson and Yang were very intentional in the planning and did not want to identify a specific target demographic, therefore it is open to the community of QIPOC. They hope that people in academics, community organizing, nonprofits, youth, and

elders are able to come out to the conference.

As the co-chairs of the conference, Jackson and Yang want people to walk away with an increased knowledge base. For Jackson, he's hoping that people consider how to positively navigate the world around them while learning how to utilize their own skills (we all have something to offer) to make social and political change as well as learn how to be even better organizers and understand the lesson of how critical it is to collaborate within and across cultures and identities.

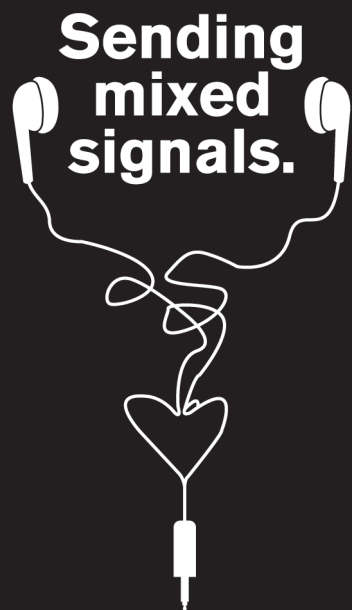
"I hope people feel empowered to go back to their own communities to create something similar or just start the discussion on the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender in whatever that means to them," he says. "I hope people find new connections, new friends, colleagues, and partners at this conference. And yes, as one out of the two people who worked really hard to pull this off, I have to say that I hope this initiative is sustained on a consistent basis."

Yang also hopes that people will bring these conversations back to the community. "This is cliché but I have to say it: I hope people leave this conference believing that they can truly make change in their own communities," she says. "Heck, they can recreate this conference and make it better. I hope that people leave this conference with renewed energy and inspiration to start their own initiatives and to collaborate across cultures, race, identities, etc. We need more of it!"

Ultimately, the two co-chairs hope the conference continues, that QIPOC can take from what the two of them have created as a platform to keep moving vital conversations of intersectionality forward. For them, they say it would be a dream come true to see the Upper Midwest QIPOC Conference happen in 2016.

"Connections are very important and if people made new connections or find community, that is a great start," Yang says. "Likewise, I hope that this conference continues in some aspect or another because it is a very important and rare space that we need for growth, development, and community building. I hope someone brave takes on the next QIPOC conference and takes the conference to another level. I have complete trust and faith in our QIPOC leaders. When the time comes, we'll help make it happen all over again." ■

For more information about the Upper Midwest Queer Indigenous and People of Color (QIPOC) Conference, go to www.midwestqipoc.wordpress.com.



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STEPHEN RHODES:

OUT RACING FOR EQUALITY

BY RANDY STERN

With the increasing number of athletes coming out (especially in the past year) you might not have seen this one coming. Stephen Rhodes came out as he was trying to get back into NASCAR's Camping World Truck Series, the third highest tier in one of the most popular sporting ventures in America. While athletes from football, soccer, basketball, and hockey (among other professional and amateur sporting arenas) have taken the step to publicly announce their sexual orientation or gender identity, motorsport is seen as one the last places you will find us. NASCAR, in particular, had a deep history of not being welcoming to GLBT folks. That has been changing, albeit slowly.

Lavender had the chance to talk to Rhodes from his home on Maui to find out where he is in his quest to return to NASCAR.

Tell us about your background. Where did you start driving? How did you get into the world of NASCAR?

Stephen Rhodes: Growing up in stock car racing's backyard, Goldsboro, NC, I dreamed of racing at NASCAR's highest level. In 1992, at the age of 8, I took the first step in making that dream a reality by climbing behind the wheel of a go-kart at Johnston County Speedway and Mitchell Road Raceway. A natural behind the wheel, I amassed 31 wins in 55 races during my first year of competition. That same season, I was named Rookie of the Year at Johnston County Speedway and finished second in the season point standings in both the amateur and junior stock divisions. The following year, I won 37 events across three different divisions at Johnston County Speedway en route to becoming the Season Champion in the Champ Star division.

By 1999, I had transitioned into racing four-cylinder stock cars. In addition to making select starts at North Carolina's Caraway Speedway and Coastal Plains Raceway, I competed full-time at Wayne County Speedway where I was named Rookie of the Year and finished third in the championship point



Stephen Rhodes in Hawaii.
Photo by Olga Brycht

standings. The following year, with 20 starts, four wins, and 13 top-five finishes, I won the Four-Cylinder Stock Championship at Southern National Speedway in Lucama, NC.

In 2001, I took the next step toward my career in NASCAR's upper ranks by competing in the NASCAR Late Model Stock Division at Southern National Speedway and Coastal Plains Raceway. After tallying back-to-back top-five finishes in the season championship point standings at Southern National Speedway, I got a chance at racing in one of NASCAR's top three national series.

I joined the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS) ranks in 2003, where I competed at Mesa Marin Raceway in California and Martinsville Speedway in Virginia and recorded two top-30 finishes. When the NCWTS team I was competing with ceased operation, I returned to NASCAR Late Mod-

el Stock Competition in my home state of North Carolina where I have since competed on a part-time basis.

When you were going through the NASCAR ranks, what accomplishments did you make? What were some of your setbacks? What lessons did you learn along the way?

SR: Too many to mention them all but I will do my best!

- First NASCAR Camping World Truck Series Race: Mesa Marin Raceway, March 23, 2003
- Best NASCAR Camping World Truck Series Start: Martinsville Speedway, April 12, 2003, 32nd
- Best NASCAR Camping World Truck Series Finish: Martinsville Speedway, April 12, 2003, 21st
- Championship Titles: Johnston

County Speedway, Champ Star Division, 1997 and Southern National Speedway, Four-Cylinder Stock Division, 2000

- “Rookie of the Year” Honors: Johnston County Speedway, 1996 and Wayne County Speedway, 1999

I was fortunate enough during these times not to have some of the setbacks most other drivers can have: I had sponsorship, top notch equipment, and frequent practice. The family business was able to put the absolute best into every car I had. I learned a lot along the way. Patience and respect are two of the ones that I still carry with me today. You need both of these to be a great driver.

The only season that came up in your record was in 2003 when you were in NASCAR’s truck series. Not much was recorded since then. What happened after that season?

SR: After the 2003 season in the truck series I returned to the NASCAR Late Model Stock series at Southern National Speedway, these types of races aren’t typically recorded on the level the upper divisions are.

How would you describe your driving style? How different, or similar, is it from your competitors in NASCAR?

SR: I would describe my driving style very similar to my my idol, the late Dale Earnhardt. Fearless. However, as you grow in the ranks it does get more and more expensive so you have to respect the cost of these machines. In some cases you can’t be a fool and ruin a \$100,000 race car.

When did you come out? How did you get to that decision? How did your family, team(s), and fans take it?

SR: I came out when I was seventeen years old. Coming to the decision to do so was easy, it is who I am. Family, teams, and fans for the most part were all pretty receptive. I don’t think I did a great job hiding it at that stage in my life anyway. It was the best feeling when my now-husband attended my races; it makes you feel complete and not in hiding.

NASCAR has always been seen as a tough place to be out. Is this still true? How are you seen by NASCAR and in auto racing as being out?

SR: NASCAR, like most sports, has come a long way. It is 2015, not 2003 anymore. We all as humans have come to a better place of respect and understanding. It still isn’t easy all the time but I think as a community we’ve even grown on how to react or deal with situations when we run



into others that aren’t comfortable with accepting it.

You are trying to get back into NASCAR Camping World Truck Series. What is the latest on the efforts to do so?

SR: The latest efforts are the most positive results I have had in years. It’s amazing how things come full circle sometimes. I can’t legally name names right now so I will say that from my first start in the NASCAR Truck Series to what potentially could be a partial Truck Series run this year involves the same PR Team. Couldn’t be happier. We are awaiting a response that is supposed to come next week.

How hard — or easy — is it to secure a team, sponsor, and a ride in any of NASCAR’s three major series? Walk us through how important having sponsorship is for a driver in NASCAR? What kind of costs are involved in running in this truck series?

SR: First you have to have a really good

[public relations] team, these can range from \$2,000 to \$10,000 a month. The PR team is really the one that puts all the deals together; it contracts and sources the team, etc. The main focus is finding sponsorship as this sport is insanely expensive. You’ll need a minimum of \$2 million per year to run in the Camping World Truck Series and that will get you to middle of the pack. To run competitive in this series you need \$4 million per year. Obviously this is no easy task as even the big names in NASCAR can sometimes have trouble. Sponsorship is key, as it will determine where you go with your career or what team you get to run for.

You are probably one of the few drivers I know that has his home base in Hawaii. How much does living there help in keeping your dreams of returning to NASCAR alive? What have you been doing other than competing to keep things going in your life?

SR: Although I’m currently living in Maui I still consider my home base North Carolina as we still have our homes there and go back and forth often. I have connections throughout the NASCAR world and stay in constant contact with them. My dreams of returning are closer than they have ever been thanks to some great people doing great things for me. These people believe in me and have the avenues I need to return. Other than surrounding myself with people like this and continuing to follow the sport closely I am always reaching out to new people that may or may not be able to help me. I’m a true believer in [it’s] who you know, not what you know. It’s worked well for me in life.

Is it important to be a beacon for your fans as being an out race driver? How are you doing so?

SR: Yes, I think it’s important as I have a platform to educate. I am involving myself in things that mean something to our community like Equality NC [The Human Rights Campaign], and other gay rights organizations. I want to be front and center as America’s first openly gay NASCAR driver fighting for equal rights.

If you do get a ride in NASCAR, what approach would you take to be out in the sport?

SR: My approach would be to use the platform and recognition that will be a media frenzy to really allow people to understand and educate themselves that we as a gay community deserve the same respect as anyone else in life.



OUR RIDES, OUR LIVES:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR COMMUNITY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AUTOMOBILE

BY RANDY STERN

The rioters at the Stonewall Inn in the West Village grew tired of the police and their tactics that night. The New York Police Department were paid protection money by establishments catering to GLBT patrons to ensure no one would get arrested over the laws that made us less than equal to the rest of society. When we fought back that night, we used everything within our reach — including parking meters.

It is ironic that 46 years later we would start discussing the history of the automobile in the GLBT community by talking about parking meters as a weapon of liberation.

On some level, the automobile has played a part in our history. They helped define our progress socially, economically, and, to a small extent, politically. Though we began in urban enclaves where the automobile was not a primary source of transportation, they would help us expand our boundaries and allow us to express ourselves through mobility and freedom of expression.

One needs to be careful when discussing this piece of our history; it's easy to fall into the trap of stereotyping, but on some level there is a kernel of truth when identifying vehicles that we embraced throughout our social history. Another factor is that the automobiles our community identified with do not fall on a national scale. Particular vehicles that framed our community in San Francisco or Los Angeles might not be as prevalent as they were in the Midwest or out East.

Yet, there were some automobiles that truly helped make our mark on GLBT social history that cut across regional lines. One such vehicle (the Jeep CJ-5) did start with a regional reference. Randy Shilts mentioned in a couple of his works about how GLBT enclaves were “invaded” in the 1970s by newly out denizens and the transformation of these communities were driven by a “hypermasculine” air. Shilts did reference the Jeep as the vehicle that would drive this communal transformation.

The original SUV had been a fixture in our community for decades. They not only denoted “masculinity” in both men and women, but they also denoted freedom. The CJ-5 turned into the longer CJ-7 and into a few generations of the Wrangler. You not only saw them in gayborhoods or around any establishment catering to GLBT clientele, but you followed them to our vacation spots, from Provincetown to Guerneville.

It was not just Jeeps. You also found early short-wheelbase Toyota Land Cruisers in the mix on the West Coast. Between the Jeep and the Land Cruiser, you can remove the top and the doors for a true open-air experience — a complete invitation toward automotive hedonism that fit the early decades of our community's development.

Luxury automobiles may seem stereotypical, but there is some truth to their presence. Older gentlemen drove around in these automobiles — mainly large American vehicles, such as the Cadillac Eldorado



Jeep. Photo courtesy of Fiat



1960 Cadillac. Photo by Randy Stern



Mitsubishi Eclipse Spyder, Volvo C70 Convertible, Mitsubishi Outlander. Photos by Randy Stern

or the Lincoln Continental Mark IV/V, preferable in the “Designer Series” models — to show off their wealth to attract the ideal mate.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were some regional differences in what we drove. Some of our community on the West Coast, and perhaps other parts of the country, had a fondness toward the Volkswagen Rabbit Cabriolet. In particular, if the car was purchased in an all-white color scheme: white exterior, interior, and convertible roof. This particular color setup was considered “feminine.” It was observed during the 1980s that it was very prevalent in several West Coast communities driven by both men and women.

In southeastern Michigan, no one purchased a foreign car during the time when the auto industry needed its support. GLBT people in the region mirrored this notion, though their preference of automobile was very particular. In a conversation I had with Jeff Stork, writer for *Car and Driver* online, *Classic American* magazine and GayWheels.com, he noted that we preferred the American personal luxury car as the vehicle of choice in that region. These vehicles would include the Ford Thunderbird and the Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme, the latter being one of the best-selling vehicles in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

This is actually a fact about us. Though there are some vehicles that we call our own, our actual tastes do reflect mainstream society. For example, Saturn was among the best selling passenger cars of its time. Its introduction in 1990 sparked a new chapter in the American automotive industry in the way these cars were constructed and in the volumes these cars sold. GLBT people, like

everyone else across the country, snapped up these plastic-skinned wonders as fast as Saturn could build them. Because they attracted a wide spectrum of buyers and were marketed to everyone who walked through the door of their stores, Saturns were known as “rainbow cars.” One particular market had a high ordinate number of Saturn owners in the GLBT community during the 1990s and 2000s: right here in the Twin Cities.

Our ownership of Saturns also revealed a truth about us. When one looked at the bear community about 20 years ago, there was a stereotypical image about the hirsute subculture that fostered a sense of masculinity, including truck or SUV ownership. The reality of the bear community was more ownership of compact cars than any other type of vehicle. Back then, bears were starting to gain traction economically as they became slowly integrated into mainstream gay/bi male culture. They had to start somewhere, and some compacts actually accommodated larger frames quite decently during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Also during the 1990s, we began to see ourselves in positive and realistic images. This included automotive marketing and advertising. On a national scale, Subaru and Volvo created ad campaigns targeting GLBT audiences. As years went by, other manufacturers saw the benefit of inclusion not only outwardly to the marketplace, but within their own organizations.

From inclusion and brand relationships came a high level of loyalty for certain brands. Some say that our community’s love for Subaru is more stereotypical than actual reality. Data does not exist on actual percentage of owners identified as GLBT for

each particular brand of automobile. However, actual confirmation in the Twin Cities and Upper Midwest regional markets show that Subaru is a prevalent brand among GLBT automobile owners. If you ask any of us why we bought our Subaru, the top reason is not because others in community have one or the brand’s continual support of our community and our causes. People who bought Subarus found them to be right for their needs and lifestyle, plain and simple.

Sometimes, being inclusive would have its own challenges. Ten years ago, Ford was the target of an unsuccessful boycott by the American Family Association. Ford has been one of the most inclusive and friendly automakers in our country. Because they advertised in GLBT media outlets, sponsored Pride events and had policies extending employment protection and benefits to their GLBT employees, AFA targeted Ford with hopes the company would back down from their efforts. Ford refused and became a stronger company from this experience.

Ford is not alone in their efforts to reach out to our community, internally as well as externally. General Motors is a leader among automakers in both efforts, along with Volkswagen of America, Subaru of America, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, Toyota Motor Sales USA, Nissan North America, and Tesla. You can also add Mitsubishi Motors North America to the mix, as well.

Today, our vehicle choices are as diverse as our community. Yet, there are some brands that hold true to our values. We no longer are in liberation, but our fight continues to gain traction across the country. In terms of our consumer power, it has never been any stronger. It is reflected on what we drive today.



SELLING WITH PRIDE:

AUTO RETAILERS SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

BY RANDY STERN

We, as consumers, are very particular about where we shop. As GLBT consumers, that entails patronizing places that welcome us in.

If a company or retailer is known to be GLBT-friendly — based on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, or through knowledge of in-house practices ensuring its employees and customers are treated equally and fairly — we will shop there and/or buy their products. If they are found to not be friendly and have a record of discrimination, we would not patronize them up through the point of a wide-ranging boycott of that business or corporation.

The automotive business has been successful in welcoming us, for the most part. Our focus is on the brand, the manufacturer, or the supplier. However, they do not represent the ultimate front line for the consumer. That would be at the retail level — the car dealer.

To see how dealerships are working with the GLBT community, I had the opportunity to talk to Richard Herod III, general manager at White Bear Mitsubishi in White Bear Lake, Jessica Katz, general manager at Kline Nissan in Maplewood, and Jason Gallus, a sales consultant at Luther Brookdale Volkswagen in Brooklyn Park.

What is your background in automotive retailing?

Herod: I started working for this organization when I was a part-time cashier in college when we were a Saturn dealership. I worked my way up through finance, mar-



(From top) Gallus; Katz.
Photos by Randy Stern.



keting, internet, sales, and eventually sales management. It's been over 18 years since I started here, and a lot has changed, namely our dealership name from Saturn of St. Paul to White Bear Mitsubishi — and my facial hair — there is a lot more of that now, too.

Katz: I have been in the automotive business for over 10 years. I never intended on making a career out of the automotive busi-

ness, my plans were to become a doctor; go to school during the day and sell cars at night. Now, after all this time has passed, I save lives in a different way: by providing safe and reliable vehicles to our customers. I started my career as a detailer, worked up to a lot technician, sales consultant, finance manager, finance director, sales manager, general sales manager, to now a general manager. I love this business!

Gallus: As a Volkswagen owner for nearly 18 years now, in the middle of 2013 I made a career change and took advantage of an opportunity to become a sales consultant at a newly opened Volkswagen dealership. It's been a brand of vehicle that I've been very passionate about owning over the years as a product that I feel is a great value for the money and incredibly fun to drive.

Do customers seek you by reputation or knowing you are GLBT, or find you through leads or random visits?

Herod: Most often I am referred by someone's friend or family member. Oftentimes people share their car-buying stories as being frustrating. Our

GLBT customer base is very loyal and refers others after they receive a great car buying experience — and they share the good news. One story I can think of is a guest who was referred by one of my customers. After she was referred, she purchased multiple Mitsubishi vehicles and has since referred three friends in the last twelve months who then purchased new and used vehicles from

us. Interestingly enough, one of her friends who traded her Honda for a Mitsubishi Outlander has since referred another friend who also just traded her Honda for a Mitsubishi Outlander.

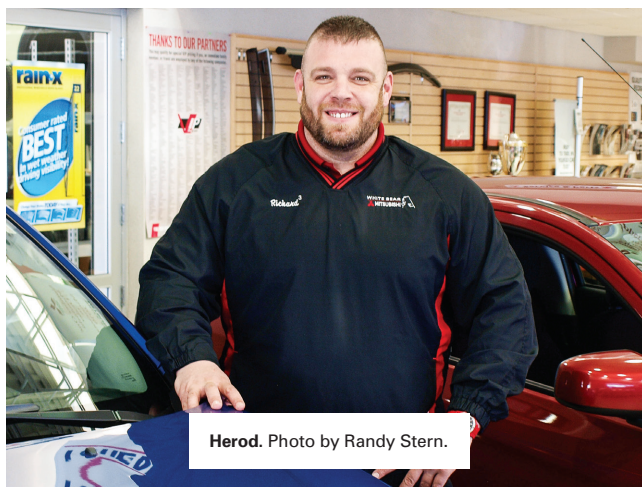
Other times I get messages on Facebook asking for assistance with selling or trading a car, and sometimes just to give a second opinion on a vehicle that was found elsewhere. A dealer's responsibility is to be of service to the community. I believe that my community is the GLBT community and they need to know that I'm here with my staff of over 80 employees to be of service. I can tell you that I have had customers pull me aside in the dealership and thank me for our support. They appreciate how "out" we are in the community.

Katz: Reputation and referrals. I have a lot of customers who refer their family members and friends to me because they are confident I will offer the best guest experience. I listen to their needs, and help find a solution that works for them. Being a part of the GLBT community, I do my best to let all of our customers know Kline Nissan is a place that is both accepting and supportive to the GLBT community.

Gallus: Referrals go a long way when it comes to shopping experiences. Ultimately, people tend to purchase from someone they feel comfortable with and by whom they are treated well. I think building customers by reputation is something that comes with time in the field. I'm not sure knowing whether or not someone is GLBT plays as much into a shopping decision as it might have years ago, especially in the metro area. Internet leads continue to be very popular and I'm always excited to get to connect with people in person when visiting our lot.

What is your approach toward your customers? How do you market to them?

Herod: My approach to customers is the same regardless of sexual orientation. Service is king and our company's vision is "to be so effective that we are able to be helpful to others." So when a customer is referred to me I sit down with them and consult their needs and help make good suggestions. I believe that if we treat customers



Herod. Photo by Randy Stern.

right, they will be satisfied enough to return and tell their friends and family.

Katz: Most customers are stressed out about buying a new vehicle, even before they park their vehicle at our store. They don't enjoy spending time at a car dealership, for the most part; they don't enjoy feeling like they are being taken advantage of; they don't like wasting their time. We get it. That's how we are different at Kline Nissan. I do my best to coach my team to identify what each customer is trying to benefit in their lives. Some clients need to replace their current vehicle, while others may just want something new. Regardless of their reasons, we are here to help! Each customer has a problem and it's our job to make sure we find them the best solution. Using these practices makes it very rewarding for us, and it allows us to build stronger, more meaningful relationships with our customers.

Gallus: My approach is to do whatever I can to best assist my customers with finding the right vehicle for their needs and budget. I do what I can to understand what is most important to them and then move forward accordingly. I strive to put myself in that position and think about how I would want to be treated when I'm a customer. As a dealer group, we have Fair Value Pricing. It's become so easy and convenient to shop online and, honestly, most people appreciate taking the negotiating out of the purchase process and knowing they are getting a very fair deal. It's a very smooth process that leaves customers feeling good about their decisions and great about their overall experiences. Most of my personal marketing has

been by referral at this point. This is done with a combination of socializing, whether it's attending social gatherings or social media, continually working to keep connected with current customers, and also offering customer referral bonuses.

How important is being out at work?

Herod: Being out is just like breathing every day for me. It just happens. My staff cares about what dates I go on, whose wedding I attended, and they've grown very fond of the friendships and customers we've created over the last 5 years as Mitsubishi.

Katz: It's important to be who you are at work, so with that being said, it is very important for me to be out at work.

Gallus: I've been inspired by a multitude of people from close friends to complete strangers. We all have our own levels of comfort and how "out" we are at work. Perhaps it's telling a select few or shouting it from the rooftops. I feel it's important for everyone to be proud of who they are and, for me personally, being out helps pave the way in hopefully empowering someone else in making it easier for them to be out, too. This overlaps all aspects from dealership coworkers to customers. With my customers, being able to share on a personal level also helps build trust, comfort, and lasting relationships from a positive experience.

What kind of future do you see for our community for your dealership?

Herod: I'd like more GLBT employees as our growth continues at a rapid pace. I'd love to sit down with anyone who wants to discuss a career that serves our community as well as our allies.

Katz: It's growing, and growing, and growing!

Gallus: As GLBT acceptance has grown over recent years, it's become easier for everyone and I only see it continuing to improve. As far as market is concerned, the excitement is building for our new store opening later this summer in a more prime location and we're working to have greater participation with community involvement, visibility, and continued excellence in customer service will only open more opportunities for growth.

Read more online at www.lavendermagazine.com



IDENTITY AND THE IRON HORSE

BY NELL GELHAUS

Kathie: *Where are you going when you leave here? Don't you know?*

Johnny: *[scoffing] Oh man, we just gonna go.*

Kathie: *Just trying to make conversation. It means nothing to me.*

Johnny: *Well, on the weekends, we go out and have a ball.*

Kathie: *And what do you do? I mean, do you just ride around? Or do you go on some sort of a picnic or something?*

Johnny: *A picnic? Man, you are too square. I'll have to straighten you out. Now, listen, you don't go any one special place. That's cornball style. You just go. [He snaps his fingers.] A bunch gets together after all week it builds up, you just...the idea is to have a ball. Now if you gonna stay cool, you got to wail. You got to put somethin' down. You got to make some jive. Don't you know what I'm talkin' about?*

"Just gonna go." Not much has changed in the motorcycle world since Marlon Brando drawled those words in 1953's *The Wild One*.

Laura Hultman is a police officer from the Minneapolis area, and the proud owner of a Harley Sportster 1200. "There's just something about riding that seems so freeing to me. Just you, the road and the wind in your face. Just ride without worrying about where you are going."

Kristine Kuzemka owns a Harley Street Glide. A lawyer from Las Vegas, she also describes the euphoria of being out on the open road. "Incredible! Freedom! Zen-like... happiness. It feels powerful in that you are on a machine that, with the twist of your wrist on the throttle, moves swiftly. You are one with the bike in curves at 60–70mph on a beautiful mountain highway. I smile every single time I get on it."

Motorcycle culture grew in the United States post-World War II, a war in which motorcycles replaced horses as something of a present-day cavalry. Upon returning home, many men, including gay men, remained in port cities. Motorcycle clubs began popping



Kristine Kuzemka and her Harley Street Glide. Photo courtesy of Kristine Kuzemka

up throughout California and Hollywood embraced the coinciding rebellious culture that came with them. The first gay motorcycle club, the Satyrs, was founded in Los Angeles the year following Brando's *Wild One*. Gay bikers were a subculture to a counter-culture, eschewing stereotypical gay effeminacy for leather and masculinity.

For women, the biker scene came decades later. In 1976 a group of women motorcyclists gathered for the San Francisco Pride parade, and were placed first in the procession. One of them coined the phrase "Dykes on Bikes," a term the women proudly wore and later trademarked. Informally, women continued to ride in the Pride parade there and elsewhere, until 1984, when a group of bikers including Sabine Balden, organized the Women's Motorcycle Contingent to appeal to all women motorcyclists.

"Politics were different then, more identity politics, and we decided we wanted to be more inclusive than just 'dykes.' We met year-round, once a month until about March, then every two weeks until the beginning of June, then weekly." Sabine still lives in the Bay area, retired after seventeen years with the San Francisco Fire Department, and

she's put more miles on her Honda Valkyrie than most have on their cars. Regardless of the inclusive name, Balden says, "Most everyone there, myself included, was an effing dyke biker, who had to swagger in order to be taken seriously out there, and we were not used to playing nice."

That swagger was necessary, Balden says, to offset the prevalent attitude that women shouldn't ride, and that if they did, it should be seated behind their boyfriend on his bike.

"I've been riding since I was 18. Back then, riding was more exclusively male. Here I was, living in the city, riding in the rain, the wind, city traffic, doing the household groceries on my bike, crossing the bridge daily, and men would see my helmet and ask whose bike I was riding on the back of. Now, I've been riding longer than some of those idiots have been alive, my current bike has more miles than they've ever ridden, and they still presume to give me advice, because you know, the little lady could probably use some pointers. It was the same sexism and homophobia all the other dykes had to live with, and the added indignity of men asking us if that bike was our boyfriend's old bike. At a stop light, at a gas station. I don't even



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go to bike events anymore. I've been to Sturgis three times, twice by accident, meaning I was riding that stretch at the wrong time, and there's only one road through South Dakota, I swear. I don't know if you've ever worked in a 'man's job,' whatever the hell that means, but you have to have this swagger or they won't leave you alone. I learned in the biker community, and then perfected it in the fire department."

Kristine Kuzemka describes a similar experience. She, too, has been riding since her childhood. "My dad had me shifting gears in his Mustang when I was five years old and I've always had an interest in cars and motorcycles. My mom and step-dad bought me my first motorcycle. We lived at the base of Sunrise Mountain and so there was plenty of desert and shoulders along roads to ride on back then."

Kuzemka has had her own encounters with gas station clerks who ask whose bike she's on, and understands the draw of groups such as Dykes on Bikes. "I guess it stems from not being pigeon-holed into traditional female roles. Actually, the first I became aware of the lesbian motorcycle culture was when I learned of Dykes on Bikes. I lived in Seattle from 1987 to 2002 and there was always a contingent in the Pride parade. I rode in many of them and one year, my mother rode on the back of my bike with a t-shirt that had 'I'm the mother and proud' on the back of it."

Today, cities across the US have their own chapters of Dykes on Bikes and gay motorcycle clubs. Minneapolis is home to a chapter that rides yearly in the parade, as well as the men's club, Twin City Riders. The draw to biker culture is similar today to the appeal sixty years ago.

"The gear, the planning. Going to Mountain Springs Saloon for a ride on a nice day and capping it off with a good cigar and talk with friends." Kuzemka describes road trips, or runs, in vivid detail, remembering burger joints and hole-in-the-wall eateries in remote locations. It's not the 'where you're going' but the entire experience of getting there that pulls people in. Social status and class crumble within a tight-knight camaraderie focused on a shared experience.

Sabine Balden says, "[It's the] iron horse, the modern version of horseback riding. Go west, young man! And seek your fortune! I do a lot of motorcycle camping, and just ride until mid-afternoon, and then start looking for camping. Constant adventure, always new experiences. *Little House on The Prairie* and *Sons of Anarchy* all rolled into one."



Sabine Balden and SEDUSSA.
Photo courtesy of Sabine Balden

She agrees the gear is a fun aspect of the biker world and important in how one presents themselves. It can identify you as traditional, or a gear head; a newbie, or part of a club. She describes the various subcultures as being similar to that of the greater GLBT community. A leather jacket and chaps could identify a rider as more traditional, she says. "Kevlar jackets, with lots of molded joint and back protection are more associated with groups who like to knee drag through curves on their café racers." Someone new might be identified by matching and unscratched gear. "A gear head has a GoPro attached to the top of their helmet, has every gadget known to man attached to their jacket and their bike." Some clubs identify themselves with patches, *Sons of Anarchy* style. She is careful to qualify these statements as generalizations with plenty of exceptions.

And of course, it'd be foolish to discount the allure of the bike itself. The machines have long been metaphors for speed, danger, and sexuality. The motorcycle says as much about its rider as anything else. *The Wild One's* Brando had his Triumph Thunderbird. Peter Fonda rode the Captain America Chopper in *Easy Rider*. Who could forget Arnold Schwarzenegger on a Harley Davidson Fat Boy in *Terminator 2* or Carrie Ann-Moss's Ducati in the chase scene of *The Matrix: Reloaded*? And more recently Jax Teller led the fictional *Sons of Anarchy* on a Harley Davidson Dyna-Glide.

Choosing a bike is all about personal preference. Beginning bikers usually start with a lower CC model, which are also used

in motorcycle classes. Seat height and handle bar comfort are considerations.

Laura Hultman says, "For me, comfort was a big deal. I wanted something I could ride for hours without getting sore. I wanted something loud. I decided to buy a Harley because I wanted the best. They are comfortable and loud. Harleys don't depreciate in value much so I know I'll get a good price when I sell it as well. There are bragging rights when you own a Harley. Lastly, as it is my first bike, I wanted something that wasn't too big or heavy for me. Now that I am more of an experienced rider, I realized that the size of the bike doesn't really affect your control over it unless you parked on a hill and need to back it up!"

Sabine Balden chose a quieter model. "I like quiet bikes so I can camp without scaring away all the critters. I have a six-cylinder Honda." Last year, her odometer rolled over, "So I'm now working on my second 100k miles. You work your way up. You have to start small-ish, so you can pick it up, because you WILL drop it a few times. Forget to put the kick stand down. Drive off with the handle bar lock on. Park her on a downhill, and not put her in gear. Stupid things like that. I started with a 250, then went 450, then 650, then 1200, then 1500. She's what's called a cruiser — longer, more comfortable. She's Valkyrie. And I'm German. Not everyone gives their bikes names, but I do. Her name is SEDUSSA, and she got the plate to match."

These women speak about their bikes with pride, and share pictures, as one would of a beloved family member. And indeed, these men and women who ride are beloved members of the GLBT community. They're often on the receiving end of the biggest cheers at Pride parades, revving their engines enthusiastically to the whoops and the yells. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, they are our protectors, too. I vividly recall Duluth Pride a few summers past, where anti-gay protestors claimed a street corner near the start of the parade. Three bikers calmly rode over to the man bellowing Bible verses from his bullhorn, parked in front of him and turned to face the parade participants and viewers. In their rugged leather, seated upon those brilliant machines, they looked for all the world like our own personal Hell's Angels, and they revved their engines louder and louder. Soon, no one could hear a bullhorn for the deafening sound of engines and applause and thanks from the crowd. And then, like Johnny said, well, we *went out and had a ball*.

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ROAD TRIP!

BY ED HUYCK



The right mix for the road is an essential part to any trip. If you have to spend hours on end in a car crossing the byways of America, it's important to have the right mix of tunes for the journey.

Technology has passed on since the days of the mix tape, but the idea remains the same. Find a bunch of tracks that can help craft the mood as you drive. Technology also means you can make your playlist as long as you want. Think of this as a kind of road-trip music helper.

THE FIRST FEW MILES

- The Village People "Go West." We'll set out west on our trip – Seattle, San Francisco, sunny L.A. – and Pet Shop Boys, "West End Girls." OK, they're singing about London, but the theme fits.
- George Michael, "I Want Your Sex." A hot jam to get you out of the crowds of the metro area and into the plains. Don't scare the cows.
- Scissor Sisters, "I Don't Feel Like Dancin'." Well you won't be able to in the car, but you can at least rock out in your seats.
- Ricky Martin, "Shake Your Bon-Bon." More car dancing. Move those hips, and point south of course.

THE LONG HAUL

- Elton John, "Benny and the Jets." You could also just play all of *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, but this will help keep the mood cool during stretches of the Dakotas or Nebraska.
- Magnetic Fields, "Andrew in Drag." Some eccentricity is in order now. Stephin Merritt provides that in spades on this hearty sing-a-long.
- B-52s, "Planet Claire." Speaking of eccentricity... The B-52s make any journey seem shorter.
- Queen, "Somebody to Love." Sure, you could relive *Wayne's World* with a certain other song, but — a little secret — this one is better.
- Culture Club, "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?" As evening transitions into overnight, let Boy George change the mood.

OVERNIGHT

- k.d. lang, "Trail of Broken Hearts." If you try to listen to the radio through the night in middle America, you'll find mainly country-western. A better choice is our favorite GLBT/animal rights activist.
- Sam Smith, "Stay with Me." Or you could listen to Tom Petty — pretty much the same.
- Rufus Wainwright, "Slideshow." Gorgeous

tune from one of modern music's most gorgeous singers.

- Kitchens of Distinction, "Drive That Fast." KoD have been somewhat lost in time, but the band's mix of shoegaze and heartfelt lyrics make perfect company for the long loneliness of the night.
- Soft Cell, "Tainted Love." We should be getting close by now. Get hopeful that the next night will be full of some sleazy fun with this classic.

HOMESTRETCH

- Judas Priest, "Hell Bent for Leather." Let heavy metal's gay icon, Rob Halford, serenade you. Sing along at the risk of your vocal chords.
- Le Tigre, "On Guard." Raw feminist punk serves as a perfect cleanser after the Priest.
- The Buzzcocks, "What Do I Get?" England's greatest creators of punk-rock singles will up the anticipation.
- The Dicks, "Wheelchair Epidemic." We'll end with a double shot of San Francisco, though in the case of the Dicks, it comes via Texas.
- Pansy Division, "Breaking the Law." One more bit of Priest to end the journey, though with a slightly different message this time out.

Have fun, don't do anything stupid, and don't forget to program the mix for the return journey.

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House Tranny

I recently heard from a reader who thought I had unfairly characterized a transgender activist. At the end of the email, the reader stated, “(Y)ou don’t usually deal with any controversial issues, especially those related to the interactions of the GLB community and the transgender community...” The reader then suggested that some might label me *Lavender* magazine’s “house tranny,” although the reader added, “(b)ut I won’t call you that.”

While I appreciated the reader’s perspective, I answered that we had “some differences of opinion.”

Still, in thinking about it afterwards, I must admit the email caused me to wonder if the reader’s commentary was indeed accurate. Have I avoided difficult issues relative to how gay, lesbian, and bi folk treat trans people? Do I avoid upsetting people? Should I be more radical, even confrontational?

Even worse, is it true: am I in fact the “house tranny” for *Lavender*? (By the way, I hate “tranny” and employ it here only because the reader used the word.)

Do I go along just to get along?

I certainly understand that in the years following the Stonewall Riots, the gay and lesbian communities wanted nothing to do with trans people — we were an impediment to their movement forward and too much baggage for obtaining societal acceptance.

Similarly, it’s true that nearly 40 years later (2007 to be precise), the Human Rights Campaign made a tactical decision to not press for transgender inclusion within the then-proposed federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act. Not long after that, a HRC fundraiser called to ask me to renew my membership. “You threw us under the bus,” I answered and reported that I’d be giving them no more money.

Then of course, there is how trans people, particularly trans women of color, are the victims of violence and that it’s primarily only Ts and straight cisgender allies who show up on Transgender Day of Remembrance. As a gay friend once confided, “That name reading of dead people is way too depressing.”

Yet, I remind myself that all meaningful change is incremental, including change for trans people. Thus, the HRC has since fundamentally altered its stance on transgender inclusion, a point that HRC Executive Director Chad Griffin made clear to me personally after I confronted (oops, there’s that word) him about the HRC not doing enough for the Ts.

True to Chad’s word, the HRC now includes at least two gender non-conforming persons on its board of directors. An employer can earn a 100% rating on the HRC Corporate Equality Index only by making gender identity a workplace protected class and only by offering trans-positive health insurance that includes hormone and

surgical benefits that conform to World Professional Association for Transgender Health standards.

Locally, many on the GLB alphabet are extremely trans friendly; some are even crucial to our success. For example, it’s a G — Phil Duran of OutFront Minnesota — who’s directly or indirectly responsible for most of the pro-transgender court cases, ordinances, and administrative rulings in Minnesota in the last fifteen years.

Similarly, it’s a pro-trans L gynecologist — Dr. Deb Thorp — who treats hundreds (maybe thousands?) of local transgender people, allowing them to transform their lives and live authentically. How many people has she saved from getting to the point of suicide?

Then there are two B women — Anita Kozan and Marge Charmoli — who operate Bi Cities, a television show which highlights many in the transgender community (note: I have appeared on the show and Anita Kozan has donated to my nonprofit).

Certainly, I have many friends and acquaintances who are gay, lesbian, and bi. Sometimes, I’m the only trans person in the room. Is that because I’m someone’s Aunt Thomasina? Am I failing the trans community by not getting in people’s faces about past injustices? Should I ignore the “transgender tipping point?”

On the other hand, could we Ts sometimes be our own worst enemies?

A few months ago, I was at a book club of a dozen retired gay men to speak about my memoir. The topic quickly shifted to living as a transwoman with a deep voice that keeps her from passing 100 percent. There were frank questions and frank answers along with much good-natured humor; eventually, I heard how I was the first trans person some had ever really gotten to know. As one person put it, “Before this, I had only a negative stereotype of transgender people. It’s refreshing to meet you.”

I share this not because of ego but because one can be a trans advocate in a variety of ways. Some march in the streets. Others angrily remind about the past, believing it’s the only way to equal footing today. There are even those who criticize that a person isn’t “trans enough.”

My advocacy involves simply showing up. As soon as I speak, anyone within earshot knows that I’m trans; I don’t need to say it. Still, I go forward leading a legal nonprofit, meeting people from all stations in life, trying to make the world a better place. I even give “Trans 101” presentations where I talk about compassion and kindness for all humans regardless of gender, sexuality, or race.

For many, I’m the first out trans person they’ve ever met and most seem to accept me. That’s the point. And no, I’m not anyone’s house anything. ■

I Miss The Whores

Some of you may remember a column I wrote about the brothel across the street from my house. To summarize: about a year ago, my friends rented their house to a couple of single girls who turned the place into a whorehouse. When I reported the activity to my friends, they shrugged it off because the girls paid their rent on time. And I didn't care either, except that all that late-night traffic kept my dogs barking through the night and disturbed my sleep.

Sadly, the entrepreneurs eventually stopped paying their rent and fled in the middle of the night, stripping the house of light bulbs, appliances, and anything else that wasn't nailed down.

After several months, my friends finally got the house fixed up and put it up for rent again.

"Please don't rent to whores, again," I pleaded. "It disturbs the dogs."

"Well, I can't promise anything," my friend said. "There aren't a lot of other jobs in the area, especially for single moms."

Last week, our new neighbor moved into the house. She is not a whore. She is something far worse.

She is friendly.

During the middle of a snowstorm, there was a knock on our door. I looked at my girlfriend in horror and said what I always say whenever anyone appears unannounced on our doorstep: "What fresh hell is this?"

"Should we answer?" she asked. I was about to suggest that we hide in the bedroom, when I noticed a pair of curious eyes peeking into our front window. We had been spotted. Reluctantly, I cracked open the door, fully prepared to politely shoo away a Jehovah's Witness. Who else would be so crazy to be out visiting in this storm?

The answer soon appeared on my doorstep in the form of a googly-eyed matron in a macramé hat. She was thrusting a banana bread at me like a weapon.

"Howdy, neighbor!" she trilled. "I just moved in across the street. What a storm, huh?"

The blizzard swirled up around her and she made a theatrical gesture to suggest she might freeze to death if I didn't invite her in. I briefly calculated what my culpability would be if I left her to die in the storm. Then I glanced at the banana bread — one of my many culinary weaknesses. Damn her!

"Come in," I said with a sigh. I reached for the banana bread, but she held it close to her bosom.

"It tastes best with a hot cup of Joe!" she said.

Clearly, she had much experience as an interloper. She knew exactly how to make a 10-minute visit drag well into the midnight hours. While she nursed her coffee and nibbled at the bread, she reported that she had been watching us from across the street and already knew our routines — what time we rose in the morning, when we returned at night, what clothes we wore when traipsing around the house. Before we knew it, she managed to extract our email and phone numbers. A fatal blunder on our parts.

I finally got her out of the house by feigning a mild coronary episode.

Since our first encounter, she has sent us a barrage of emails extending invitations, none of which we've responded to. We've taken to avoiding returning home during daylight, when we'd be easy targets for her aggressive conviviality.

This morning, we spotted her on watch. She has taken to stationing herself in her living room window, watching for signs of movement in our house. The moment we turn a light on she hustles across the street, armed with homemade cake and dismaying good cheer.

"I think we're going to have to move," said my girlfriend.

"I miss the whores," I sighed. ■

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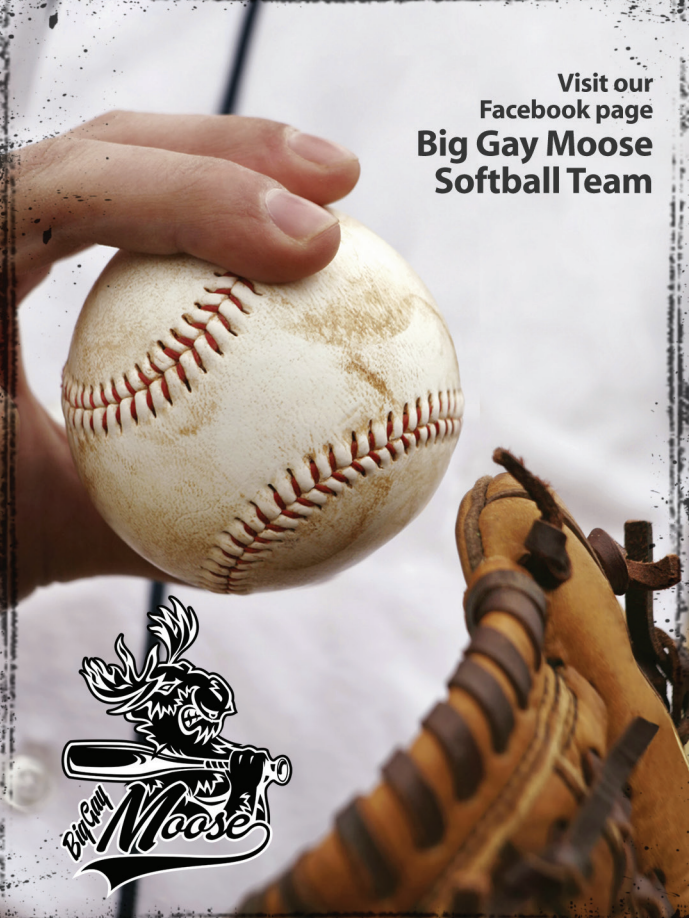
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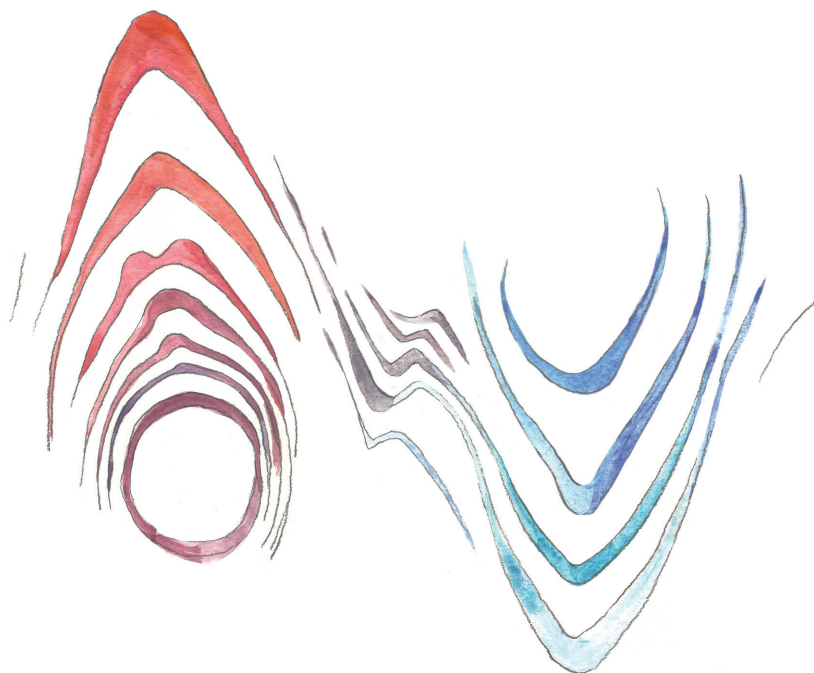
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And remember when you last saw him. Remember what you thought then, what you're thinking now, what you'll think tomorrow, when you see his face or hear his name.

Is it like it was before, when your relationship was budding and your nighttime enthralling? Is it, as the optimist says, that things are less lustful now than early on, but still intimate, maybe better? Or the pessimist, who'll say it isn't you who's lost interest, but "it's just not the same between us." Or are you one of the others, who say, "but we're still in love," who can't imagine life with *or* without him?

When you think of sex, do you think of him? Are you just "comfortable?" Or does hearing his name make you cringe?

Are you lying?

I write this to you in advance, on Valentine's Day. Men are busying themselves with last-minute "oh shit" moments (I've yet to see any women in the same situation). The man at the table next to mine — I'm at a coffee shop — has called five restaurants for last-minute dinner reservations. He takes a call from his wife between his failed attempts and he and she continue an argument from earlier in the day: "Fuck, Patricia," he whispers angrily, "I told you, I'll pay it tomorrow."

I wonder what he and Patricia were like when they met, and under what circumstances. David, we'll call him. David and Patricia.

David's a clean-shaven guy, solid build, late-thirties. He's handsome and smells like spicy cologne. I sat next to him in hopes that he'd ask for my hand ('cause you never know). His hair is thick, short, brunet. He is the universally attractive man, someone you see as the handsome womanizer in a Lifetime film, the masculine guy in a series on Bravo, a *Mad Men* cast character.

He has about him the air of a frat-boy-turned-business-man, someone who works late, has spontaneous outings with his friends, but schedules in advance regular "date nights" with Patricia. He's ambitious, coworkers think, but are his long hours at the office spent to

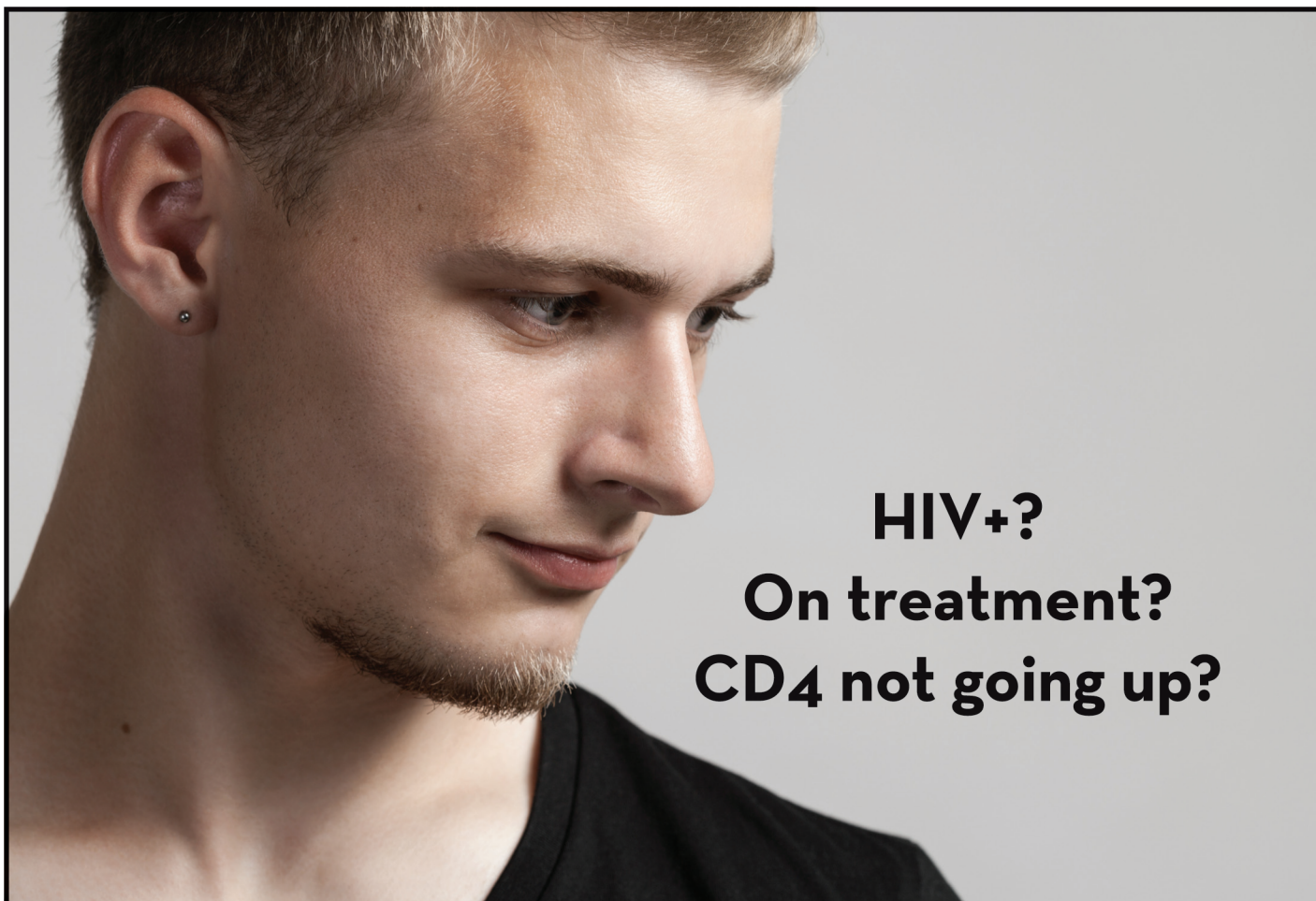
benefit his career, or are they distractions from screaming children at a dinner table and a frazzled Patricia, who'll say, "You do the dishes. I'm too tired," to which he'll respond, "*I'm* tired. You've been at home all day," as if his being tired is more warranted than hers.

I shouldn't think this way. I should think that David and Patricia are happy, that they find time to screw at least twice a week, that their arguments start and end with small-time bickering. David's simply forgotten that today was Valentine's Day, or thinks to himself, "I love Patricia all year long. Why do we need a special day?"

Who is Patricia to David? Is she exclusively maternal — a sounding board, keeper of reason, mother to his kids? Are they still ravenous in bed? Does she turn him on? And does he, her?

They met in college at a kegger, I pretend. He bumped into her dancing, she spilled her drink, they exchanged numbers, explored each other's body, found each other's heart, and began a chain of decisions and coincidences that led David to this very place at this very time, sitting at a coffee shop next to me.

And then his phone argument with Patricia ends with him saying, "I love you too. I can't wait to see you, gorgeous." ■



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